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AUTHOR	Tolliver, Derise; Tisdell, Elizabeth J.
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ABSTRACT

Various disciplinary perspectives can help in understanding relationships among cultural identity, spirituality, and sociopolitical development and their role in teaching for transformation. Educators must consider how the spirituality omnipresent in the learning environment informs emancipatory education. Cultural identity development is coming to know self as expression of Spirit; oppression causes limited perceptions of self; as people remember their spiritual essence, they can withstand oppression and be motivated to support social transformation. Adult education discourses on social transformation have a potential connection to spirituality issues; those on transformative learning attend to spirituality's role and connection to culture. Discourses on challenging power relations of interest in social transformation are feminist and critical pedagogy, critical multiculturalism, resistance postmodernism, and African-centered perspectives. Liberation theology and spiritual and religious pluralism are movements in religious and spiritual traditions concerned with social justice and transformation issues challenging power systems. Emancipatory spirituality deals with justice issues challenging systems of oppression grounded in spiritual commitment. Encompassing critical thinking and psychological empowerment, sociopolitical development is transformational, with spirituality critical to liberation activity. By exploring work of these disciplinary fields and integrating it with their field, adult educators may be able to further develop existing theory resulting in more relevant, effective practice for social change. (41 references) (YLB)

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Bridging Across Disciplines: Understanding the Connections between Cultural Identity, Spirituality and Sociopolitical Development in Teaching for Transformation

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Derise Tolliver
DePaul University, USA

Elizabeth J. Tisdell
National-Louis University, USA

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Abstract: We briefly review and analyze the literature of several different disciplinary perspectives to understand the relationships between cultural identity, spirituality, sociopolitical development and their role in teaching for transformation.

September 11, 2001 has become a day that everyone will remember because of the tragic events that occurred in the United States. People's lives have been dramatically altered and they have begun to wrestle with questions about meaning and purpose, seeking out spirituality and religion for answers. With government and media attention on "Muslim terrorists," reports of aggression against people assumed to be of Arab descent, and examinations of US foreign policy in general, people are talking more about difference, particularly race, ethnicity, culture, class, national origin, and religion. Politics, power, and power relations are now perceived with a heightened sense of saliency. In the midst of everything, many are contemplating the need to be involved in social transformational activities in order to ensure that the world will survive.

How can adult educators best prepare for educating for social transformation? What knowledge is necessary for developing relevant theory and practice? The literature in this field has begun to address important elements related to this task, including transformative learning theory and the literature discussing challenging power relations based on race, culture, class, sexual orientation. However, there is little discussion of the relationship between spirituality and culture in teaching for social transformation (Tisdell & Tolliver, 2001), while sociopolitical development is just beginning to be considered in this field (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2001). Although some of these issues may only recently be finding their way into the adult education literature, they have been the subjects of examination in other, related fields. By reviewing the discourse of other perspectives, we might be better able to support and enhance the work of our own profession. *Thus, the purpose of this paper is to briefly review and analyze the literature of several different disciplinary perspectives to help us understand the relationships between cultural identity, spirituality, sociopolitical development and how these interactions can inform our engagement in transformative educational practices.* After defining what we mean by spirituality, we examine the discourses in education that deal with social transformation, the psychology literature, including African-centered perspectives, community psychology, and identity development theory, and liberation theology.

Defining "Spirituality"

We make several assumptions when defining spirituality, based on reading the literature on it, and our own experience of it. First, "spirituality is an aware honoring of the Life-force that's happening through everything (Riddle, cited in Tisdell, 2000)." Second, given that this Life-force is everywhere, people's spirituality is always present (though usually unacknowledged) in the learning environment. Third, spirituality is about how people make meaning, and about experiences that get at the wholeness and interconnectedness of all of Life. Fourth, spirituality is about how people construct knowledge through largely unconscious and symbolic processes, often cultural, manifested in such things as image, symbol, music. Fifth, spirituality invites people into their own authenticity. Sixth, spirituality and religion are NOT the same, although for many people they are inter-related. And finally, spiritual experiences generally happen by surprise. It is the connection of spirituality to symbolic processes that connects it most specifically to culture. Further, given that people's

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spirituality is always present on some level in the learning environment, it is incumbent upon educators to consider how it might inform emancipatory education efforts.

Cultural Identity Development

Cultural identity is a psychologically central aspect of an individual's self-concept deriving from their awareness of membership in a particular social group (Milville, 2000). It is a multidimensional, socially constructed reality that has values and emotional significance attached to it (Parham, 2001), often informing other aspects of functioning including political ideology and involvement in cultural practices.

Racial and cultural identity theories were first developed to understand the evolution of identity congruence in the context of social oppression (Parham, 2001; Helms, 1984). They have been based primarily on the 5 stage nigrescence of Black identity initially described by Cross (Parham, 2001). Succinctly, they described how individuals move from a position of devaluing their oppressed identity to embracing a positive cultural self that integrates the new identity into a more universal perspective (Myers et. al., 1991). For members of privileged groups, cultural identity development is characterized by the movement from denial of cultural differences to an acknowledgement of privilege and its benefits (Helms, 1984).

Myers et.al. (1991) expanded the racial/cultural identity literature with their conceptualization of optimal identity development as a process of coming to know self as expression of Spirit. It posited that oppression results in individuals perceiving themselves in limited ways, alienated from their intrinsic value and connection to others. As they increasingly remember their spiritual essence, they can withstand assaults from oppression, resulting in more motivation and incentive to change inequitable social situations and support social transformation.

Education Discourses Dealing with Social Transformation: Finding A Place for Spirituality

There are a number of discourses within the field of adult education that deal with issues related to social transformation. They are summarized below, drawing a potential connection for attending to issues related to spirituality.

Transformative Learning

Probably the most often cited work in the field of adult and higher education that deals with transformation is rooted in Jack Mezirow's theory of transformative learning, which emphasizes critical reflection on assumptions and changing behaviors as a result of a disorienting dilemma. For Mezirow, and those who rely on his work, the unit of analysis has tended to be *the individual*. Many have critiqued Mezirow's work as being more a theory of individual rather than social transformation and is more driven by the role of rationality and critical reflection in challenging underlying beliefs. Yet this work has made an enormous contribution to the myriad ways in which individuals may undergo a transformed perspective. More recently, a number of authors (Mezirow and Associates, 2000) have talked about the importance of considering asymmetrical power relations in transformational learning theory as a theory in progress, of dealing with diversity issues which potentially results in social action. In general, however, even these more recent discussions of transformative learning based on the expansion of the work of Mezirow & Associates (2000) have given little to no attention to the role of spirituality in the transformative learning process.

There are other discussions of transformative learning in education, however, that do attend more to the role of spirituality. For example, Tobin Hart (2000) focuses on transformational learning from a transpersonal psychology and evolutionary consciousness perspective that includes attention to the spiritual. But Hart doesn't deal with the relationship of spirituality to cultural identity or teaching for cultural relevance. Clearly, Parker Palmer's (1998) work on the connection of spirituality and education, his attention to graced moments in teaching and learning, brief considerations of social action and mention of culture slightly touch on the connection of spirituality to culture. Kazanjian and Laurence's (2000) consideration of spiritual and religious pluralism specifically in higher education suggests implications for working across difference that more directly relate to teaching for cultural relevance. David Abalos (1998) discusses a theory of social transformation aimed specifically at the

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needs of the Latino community and discusses the importance of reclaiming four faces (the personal, political, historical, and sacred) of one's being as part of the transformation process. His emphasis on the sacred face highlights the importance of spirituality.

Discourses Dealing with Power Relations

Because many discussions of transformative learning focus more on the transformation of the individual, those who are interested in *social* transformation tend to draw on different theoretical traditions that deal more directly with how to teach to challenge *power relations* based on race, gender, class, sexual orientation, dis/ability. Much of this literature is informed by Paulo Freire (1971) whose work initially focused on education for challenging class relations in Brazil, and gave rise to the critical pedagogy literature (e.g. Sleeter,1996). These discourses on challenging power relations include critical and feminist pedagogy, the critical multicultural and resistance postmodernism literature, and African-centered perspectives.

Feminist and critical pedagogy. As a body of literature feminist pedagogy calls attention to the important ways women (and some men) construct knowledge through connection and relationship, and to the role of the affective dimension in learning. This has important implications for attending to spirituality, as the spiritual dimension of learning is about the connection and interrelationship of all things. Many feminist and womanist writers also discuss the role of gender as it intersects with race, class, culture, sexual orientation (Johnson-Bailey, 2001; Hart, 1992; Sheared, 1994). Discussions of feminist pedagogy tend to foreground the five following issues in teaching and learning: (1) the construction of knowledge; (2) voice; (3) authority; (4) how positionality of both teachers and learners shapes teaching and learning; (5) identity as constantly shifting and developing (Maher & Tetreault, 1994; Tisdell, 1998). The factors of positionality and identity as constantly shifting connect directly to spirituality and cultural relevance in that spiritual development emphasizes the movement toward greater authenticity. Further the issue of positionality connects directly to cultural identity.

Critical Multiculturalism and Resistance Postmodernism. There is a wide body of literature in education that deals with teaching to challenge power relations based on race and culture, as well as class, gender, and sexual orientation (Hayes & Colin, 1994; Guy, 1999). These discourses that foreground power relations based on culture and race can be broadly termed the critical multicultural or antiracist literature (Banks, 1994; Sleeter, 1996). Strongly related to some of the discourses of critical multiculturalism are the resistance postmodernist discourses in education. They focus on how power relations shape our understanding of our identity. The emphasis on the importance of deconstructing and understanding how race, gender, and class relations have shaped or constructed our understanding of identity is key to understanding how one can reclaim that identity anew. Unlike ludic versions of postmodernism which simply emphasize deconstruction for its own sake, resistance postmodernists would see that deconstruction *and reclaiming* of one's cultural identity as an important part of challenging power relations (Sleeter, 1996). A hard core postmodernist might have trouble with the notion of an "authentic" identity since postmodernists tend to emphasize the notion of identity as socially constructed and would problematize any notion of an "essential" or "authentic" self. Yet, resistance postmodernists would see the value of challenging power relations and reclaiming one's identity anew as being part of working for individual and social change. Some might also recognize that spirituality can be a part of that reclaiming process.

African-centered Perspectives. While some authors specifically identify themselves with the discourses of critical multiculturalism, others more specifically identify with the literature on teaching for cultural relevance, most often identified with a particular cultural group (Abalos, 1998; Guy, 1999; Colin & Guy, 1998). African-centered, or Africentric perspectives comprise one such body of literature. This perspective has a long intellectual history, in the writings and actions of DuBois, Wells-Barnet, Fanon, Robeson and Garvey, and more recently Asante, Nobles, and Akbar (Chowdhury, 1997; Malveaux, 2001). African-centered perspectives criticize the negative aspects of Western epistemology, challenging the hegemony of a universalistic Eurocentric paradigm that views all aspects of human experience from a white, male, middle-class norm (Graham, 1999; Okafor, 1996). These approaches are, in part, about resistance against dominating cultural, political, and educational practices that damage the spirits of people of African descent.

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Centric suggests a point of entry for understanding reality (Dei, 1998). Therefore, more than just a critique of Eurocentrism, African-centered scholars affirm the validity of African ideals and values and legitimize African-based epistemologies in the analysis of African diasporic culture and development. Discussions of the perspective generally emphasize the principles of spirituality, community, harmony with nature, identity grounded in the collective, and interconnectedness. It encourages and promotes self-determination for people of African descent without denying the rights of others (Graham, 1999). It provides a liberatory approach to education because by its very nature it demands a critical consciousness about one's place and position in a larger world where injustice exists. While it speaks to the specific liberation of people of African descent, the principle of interconnectedness leads not only to addressing social injustice directed toward oneself, but also addressing the oppression of others.

Dei (1998) notes the African-centered perspective views the process of teaching, learning and sharing knowledge as fundamentally a power relation. For inclusivity to be meaningful, it must lead to power sharing in the process of creating and validating knowledge. Consequently, among the objectives of this perspective is the undoing of miseducation of the dominated and dominant through re-education and re-analysis of the experiences of people of African descent. However, while power-sharing is important, Watts et. al. (1999) also note that African-centered education extends beyond the individual with the pursuit of knowledge residing in a higher purpose. Armed with the knowledge of cultural strengths and a higher purpose, learners can contribute to the very real struggle for liberation, social justice and transformation beyond the immediate self and cultural group.

Liberation Theology, Spiritual and Religious Pluralism, and Social Transformation: Towards an Emancipatory Spirituality

There have been many spiritual movements within some of the world's religious and spiritual traditions that have been concerned about issues of social justice and transformation that focus on challenging systems of power and privilege. The Christian liberation theology movements of Latin America were explicitly concerned about challenging class-based and other forms of oppression based on an understanding of Jesus as liberator and concern for the poor and oppressed. Paulo Freire was strongly influenced by this tradition (Horton & Freire, 1990). Theologians such as James Cone(1990) have developed a theology of black liberation focusing on challenging racism, while feminist theologians (Ruether, 1996) have focused on gender and womanist theologians (Cannon, 1996; Williams, 1993) have developed a theology of liberation based specifically on the needs of African American women. All such liberation theologians specifically have an activist agenda based on a justice-oriented spirituality. There are similar such efforts at understanding religious and cultural pluralism and challenging systems of oppression within many spiritual and religious traditions (Eck, 2001; Kazanjian & Laurence, 2000). Lerner (2000) refers to those efforts at dealing with justice issues meant to challenge systems of oppression that are grounded in a spiritual commitment of any kind as "emancipatory spirituality." He notes, "To achieve and sustain this transformation, Emancipatory Spirituality encourages people to work together in social and political movements, and to fill those movements with a powerful spiritual practice that includes meditation, celebration of the universe..." (p. 169). An emancipatory spirituality, in contrast to what he refers to as a "reactionary spirituality" (p. 174), recognizes the value of pluralism, and the many manifestations of spirit within different cultures and traditions, while a reactionary spirituality insists on only one "correct" way (theirs) of viewing the world.

As noted elsewhere (Tisdell, 2000) many activist adult educators are informed by an "emancipatory spirituality" grounded and based in one or more of these spiritual traditions. However, feminist theologian Sharon Welch (1999) suggests in considering the role of spirituality in doing justice work, we need to be committed to the high ideals of our spirituality, at the same time that we need to be suspicious of our motives, lest we assume that ours is the "right" way or the only way. Nevertheless, a spirituality that is grounded in justice and built on creating communal connections across difference does offer hope, and can contribute to both the theory and practice of social change education.

Sociopolitical Development

A number of theorists, researchers, and practitioners in the field of community psychology have articulated the reciprocal interaction between individual development issues and larger contextual factors as individuals move toward empowerment (Santos et. al., 2001; Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1994). As noted by Watts et. al. (1999), "true sociopolitical development occurs when the individual is able to integrate experiences in different power relationships into a multileveled understanding of oppression." Sociopolitical development is seen as a process that encompasses critical thinking and psychological empowerment.

The process of learning to take action for transformation develops over time. It involves the progressive increase of conscientization (Horton & Freire, 1990) about the relevance of political issues to self and the community. Watts et. al. (1999) have theorized a model of sociopolitical development that describes movement away from internalized oppression and internalized racism into an increased sense of self-efficacy and decrease in alienation from cultural group membership. Sociopolitical development is seen as transformational, with spirituality being critical to liberation activity. The work of African American social change movements, as well as the liberation struggles of people in Latin America (Potts, 1994) provide examples of the importance of spirituality to empowerment, agency and subsequent action.

Implications For Adult Education Theory And Practice

How we understand the world and our place in it is influenced by our culture, cultural identity, and sense of spirituality and sociopolitical development. This is especially evident since September 11, 2001. As adult educators who continue to work in support of a better world, it is incumbent upon us to better understand how culture, cultural identity, spirituality and sociopolitical development work together to make learners who they are, influence their thoughts about social justice, and influence their level of involvement in social action and transformational learning activities. By exploring the work of other disciplinary fields, and integrating it with our own, we may be able to further develop existing theory within the field resulting in more relevant, effective practice for social change.

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